

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

COMMITTEES:
AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION AND FORESTRY
BANKING, HOUSING AND
URBAN AFFAIRS
HOMELAND SECURITY AND
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
INDIAN AFFAIRS
SMALL BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

January 10, 2014

Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW, - Room 7100
Washington, DC 20548

To Mr. Dodaro:

The Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee (HSGAC) is concerned over repeated reports that postal customers are not experiencing postal service that meets the delivery standards required by U.S. Code (U.S.C.) Title 39, Section 3691. As such, I request that GAO, working with and utilizing the expertise of the Postal Regulatory Commission as needed, assess how the postal service measures service standards, if those measurements accurately reflect the time it takes postal customers to send or receive mail, and what steps the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) could take to improve compliance with service standards.

The USPS plays a critical role in the U.S. economy, especially in rural areas. Mail service remains the most efficient way for many businesses to ship products to customers and to obtain supplies and spare parts. As such, it is important that small businesses and all postal customers have access to reliable postal service that meets required service standards. However, during oversight of USPS and ongoing work on postal reform legislation, the HSGAC has received reports that service standards are not being correctly measured and that the calculated delivery time does not accurately represent the length of time it takes for a mailed item to be given to USPS and then arrive at a final destination.

I am requesting that GAO complete a study with the following focus points:

- An assessment of how USPS measures delivery times to ensure legislative requirements for service standards in U.S.C. 39 are being met. This assessment should include an examination of the accuracy of these methods.
- An examination of how accurate USPS measurements of experienced delivery times are and if the delivery standards that USPS publicly reports accurately reflect the service that postal customers experience. While it may not be feasible to examine all parts of the nation in this context, we feel that any examination should include studies of representative regions, with particular attention paid to rural and highly-rural areas, as well as regions which suffer from severe weather that could regularly impact service standards.
- If postal customers are experiencing delivery times which are greater than what USPS measures as service standards, GAO should provide its recommendations on how best USPS can improve its compliance with service standards and better measure actual delivery times.

This study could play a critical role in HSGAC's ongoing efforts to improve postal operations by giving the committee the research it needs to make the best possible legislative decisions. In order for USPS to return to financial stability, it is critical that USPS provide customers and potential customers an accurate accounting of service standards and actual delivery times.

I look forward to providing further details about this requested study at your convenience. Please contact Eric Bursch with my office at (202) 224-9850.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Heidi Heitkamp". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'H'.

Senator Heidi Heitkamp